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ABSTRACT

The basic goal of the Natchez-Adams Parent Center is to enable parents to work more effectively with their children at home and to improve academic achievement. Teachers complete a referral form indicating with which skills a child may need additional help. Parents take the form to the center and receive information about additional resources and how to help their child. The center provides instructional materials, equipment such as computers, parent workshops, and access to other community agencies. An address for additional information, a newspaper article, and a teacher referral from are included. (EJS)

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THE PARENT CENTER: SUCCESS IN NATCHEZ

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by

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"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Betty, a single mother, leaves the Central Office building with a white paper shopping bag filled with educational materials for her child. Betty has just visited the Parent Center to receive training and materials to work at home with her daughter. Almost without knowing it, Betty has also received material that will help her be a better parent and improve her own efforts to complete her GED.

She is like many parents in the Natchez-Adams School District who have found a friendly place to go and learn about their children, their local schools, and themselves. They are discovering that other parents share similar problems in child rearing and educational development. A support system of Parent Center staff, teachers, and other parents are making learning- for both parent and child- less threatening.

The Natchez-Adams Parent Center, funded through Chapter I, brings the home and school closer together and promotes parent involvement in the education of their child. The basic goal of the Center is to enable parents to work more effectively with their children at home and to improve academic achievement. Several additional facets of service available are: instructional materials, equipment, such as computers, and parent workshops. These provide assistance to both parent and child. For many parents, the Center serves not only as a resource and support system, it also provides access to other community agencies. While initial contact

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between parent and Center may be educational, the services may span from the "Clothes Closet" for coats, Lions Club for glasses, Special Services Department referrals, and even food baskets and Christmas Tree Fund.

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

A study of district achievement scores and retention rates focused staff attention on the need to involve parents actively in their child's education. In 1987, a pilot program began in one of the district's more disadvantaged neighborhood schools. The first two years were spent making activity packets, contacting parents for conferences, making home visits, and informing teachers about the Parent Center. Location in a neighborhood school resulted in the center being viewed as serving only that parent/student population.

The program was moved to the Central Office in 1989. This move was precipitated by court-ordered school closings. Administration felt that the Parent Center could and should serve the entire school system. By locating the Center in the Central Offices, we were able to build a district-wide service concept. Participation now reflects that an easily accessible, neighborhood neutral location has contributed to much broader participation.

From these humble beginnings the Center has increased the number of participants by 565 percent and now serves 678 families. With a district enrollment of 6,200 students in two primary, two elementary, a middle school, and a high school plus two parochial schools, the Parent Center has become the hub of parental involvement in Natchez.

Some parents lack transportation. Plans are underway to either provide parent transportation or take programs and services to the neighborhoods. In several housing projects there are key individuals that have offered to support, promote, and assist Parent Center staff in gaining access and acceptability to many of those needing services.

Efforts to link Adult Literacy, GED, Adult Basic Education, and Community College services into a coordinated and concerted endeavor to raise the general educational level in our community are underway. Again, research reflects the influence of parent educational attainment to student achievement.

Natchez-Adams Parent Center is attempting to lead the way to a total integrated learning effort by parents and children. We believe that education does make a difference.

OPEN DOOR POLICY

Most parents introduction to the Parent Center services is a result of parent-teacher conferences at their individual schools. Teachers complete a form indicating skills in which a child appears to be deficient or may need additional work. (Appendix A) Parents receive this form and take it to the Parent Center in the Central Office. They receive information about some of the resources and how they might help their child.

Upon their arrival at the Parent Center, staff will review the teacher recommendations, show the parent all the Center services, and demonstrate the materials the parent is to take home. When the parents feel comfortable with the assigned activities, they check the materials out and make plans for the next visit. Often, a parent can simply drop by and with a brief session take home the appropriate packets to work with their child.

Teacher referrals are not the only way parents come to the Center. Even the Superintendent gets into the act when a parent calls to discuss a particular learning problem they are having with a child. Parent success resulting from their experiences with the Center are producing word-of-mouth recommendations from parent to parent; "You should go by the Parent Center. They really helped my child." Some extremely pleased parents have even written to the local newspaper with praise for the Center. (Article included)

SERVICES OFFERED

Workshops are a vital part of the Center's activities. One of the first workshops each year is for teachers. It is critical that teachers are aware of what the Center can do to support them. Research indicates that parent support for education and their willingness to spend time with their child can significantly improve student learning. As teachers accept the need for parent involvement and Parent Center support, the teacher referral rate climbs.

Numerous parent workshops conducted by the Center are an important part of their service. For instance, the parent may be required to attend a workshop in order to check out a computer with reading and math programs. This assures that the parent is able to set-up the system and run the program. Since all students in the district spend time working with computers, the child generally can work through the program exercises very well. Other workshops are available through videos, by staff, or from outside consultants. Workshops are offered in assertive discipline for the home, parenting skills, drug awareness programs, self-esteem, and homework just to name a few.

Parents check educational materials out for two weeks, much like a library. These materials include activity packets, learning games, videos, computer software, cassette tapes, workbooks, and recreational reading materials. Materials are also available for parents that range from "How to Help Your Child Learn at Home" to basic adult literacy skills.

Leon, a young father, visits the Center regularly to get materials for his children. He is also seeking help for himself as he pursues his GED. He can work on a computer system which adjusts to his achievement level and can print take-home worksheets individually for him.

It is often discovered that parents like Leon have needs which cannot be met by the Center. Parents and children are referred to school and community agencies which work closely

with the Center. For example, students are referred to the testing department, psychological services, the teacher support team, or the health nurse. Parents are referred to welfare, mental health, job training, adult education programs, or parent support programs.

SUMMARY

Excitement about the growth of the Parent Center has spread throughout the school district and community. Teachers and parents feel ownership, while students achievement and self-esteem increase.

Although the Parent Center won a national award and recognition from the United States Secretary's of Education Initiative to identify excellence in compensatory education, this is only the beginning. Future plans include a concerted effort to unite the school, parents, and the community in a total effort to meet the needs of the districts' families.

For additional information contact:

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PARENT CENTER

NATCHEZ-ADAMS SCHOOL DISTRICT
PHONE 445-2897

PARENT ASSISTANT SHEET

DATE OF PARENT CONFERENCE_____

PARENT_____

ADDRESS_____

PHONE_____

STUDENT_____

TEACHER_____

GRADE_____

SCHOOL_____

RECOMMENDATION_____

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TO THE TEACHER: THANKS FOR YOUR COOPERATION. PLEASE SEND THIS FORM WITH THE PARENT TO THE PARENT CENTER AS SOON AS YOU HAVE RECOMMENDATIONS SO WE CAN FILL YOUR REQUEST.

CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR CHILD???
LET US HELP YOU

Parent Center helps with kids

Top of the Morning

DEEDE LEE
Natchez resident

All parents have their child's best interest at heart. It's nice to know that there are other caring individuals willing to help parents with their children.

I would like to thank the teachers, teachers assistants, Chapter I Parent Center and all the personnel of the Natchez-Adams County Public Schools for their help.

My child attends Northside Elementary. At Northside, you are made to feel that your child is Number One. Mrs. (principal Judith) Lann takes time to talk if you have a problem with your child. Mrs. Bradford, Miss Harrigill and Mrs. Ridley have taken time out of their busy schedules to talk with me about my child and told me when she needed help.

I am a parent of a Chapter One child. That's how I learned about the Parent Center, located at Braden School. The ladies at the Parent Center, Mrs. Mayo, Mrs. West and Mrs. Hampton, are very nice.

The Parent Center has all kinds of materials for kindergarten through seventh grade children. They hold assertive disicipline and parenting workshops. The Parent Center has books, cassette tapes, learning games, computers and other materials that are recommended by teachers.

I signed up for a computer. After a four-week wait, I was called in for a crash course in computers at the Parent Center. I was afraid because all I had ever done with a computer was put a disk in it. I thought I would appear stupid. When I attended the workshop, there were other parents there with similiar feelings. We found that it was very easy.

When I got home with the computer, my daughter, DeAnn, thought Santa had come early. We began working for 30 minutes each night. DeAnn enjoyed learning on the computer so much she wanted to work longer. The learning games on the computer even took the place of Nintendo. When DeAnn lost her shot at "saving the princess," she would go to the computer and play learning games until I forced her to go to bed.

I would advise anyone with a Chapter 1 child to go to the Parent Center. They have lots of books, games and materials that you can use to help your child in school. Check them out. Sign up for a computer. It's free. You can keep the computer for six weeks and spend quality time with your child. My child and I have enjoyed it.

Natchez-Adams School District personnel have done a great job this year with all the changes they had to make at the beginning of the year. Keep up the good work.

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